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SANDFLY

791 In a section of Sandfly known as Baker's Crossing lives Ophelia Baker, better known as Madam Truth, professed fortune teller and clairvoyant. The woman's sober attire and her modern attractive house give little evidence of her profession. When holding a seance, however, her whole appearance undergoes a change; her body becomes tense and jerks spasmodically; her dark eyes roll wildly. Of her ability in her chosen field the medium says, "I advise on business an love affeahs. I tell good an bad nooz comin tuh yuh. Deah's a remedy fuh ebry trouble an I hab dat remedy, fuh a spirit hab brung it tuh me."[22a, e]

791 794 783 [533] Madam Truth, a member of the Holy Sanctified Church of Sandfly, said that all members must undergo a sanctifying process in order to be saved. After this has been accomplished members claim to be able to hear, from a great distance, singing, talking, and the sounding of drums. We were told that the beating of the drums has a special significance, but that was all we could learn on the subject; we were told that this was a secret, divulged only to members.

794 262 Members of the church are forbidden to eat certain kinds of fish and also cabbage, lettuce, and other green vegetables. The reason they give is that they have received a warning from the spirits that it is unwise to eat these foods.[65]

791 533 262 The plump, dark-skinned fortune teller said that she had spent her childhood on Skidaway Island. She remembered hearing the drums beaten to tell the people in the nearby settlements of an approaching dance or festival. Her father had been one of those who beat the drum and thumped out a regular message on it, a message that could be heard for miles and was clearly understood by all those who had heard it.[26]

764 [782] The woman also remembered wakes which had been held on Skidaway. Coffee and sandwiches were served the mourners, each one of whom poured some of the coffee on the ground for the spirit of the deceased.[37b, e, 59b, e]

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SUNBURY

795 Savannah an he is dressed in a long robe. He walk long an
796 duh folks all mahch behine im. Dey goes down tuh duh rib-
292 buh an sing as dey go. Dey alluz hab duh baptizin wen duh
783 tide is goin out so duh watuh will wash duh sins away. Attuh
dey all gits tuh duh ribbuh, dey stop an duh preachuh ast
duh candidates tuh step fawwud. One by one he dip em in
duh watuh an dey is buried in baptism. Wen dey is all bap-
tize, duh preachuh pray tuh duh ribbuh an [63] ast dat all sins
be taken away. Den all duh folks sing an shout an praise
duh Lawd."

The little group leaning on the railing nodded in agree-
ment and as if in memory of the ceremony their bodies swayed
rhythmically. As we listened and watched we could almost
see the white robed procession winding to the river bank; we
could almost hear the chanting of the converts as their sins
were washed away.

764 The conversation turned to burial customs in the section
and the women told us that "settin-ups" were still held for
those who died.

"We all sit wid duh body an sing an pray an keep duh
spirit company," said one of them.

Another added, "At duh fewnul we sing an we puts our
777 hands on duh cawpse tuh say goodbye. It bad luck not tuh
do dis." [31]

We had heard in other communities that in case of death
away from home the body is brought back to its native town
for burial. This custom is also prevalent in Sunbury, we
learned.

"Ebrybody wannuh be buried in deah own town," [1] Eliza-
609 beth said. "An we nebuh bury strainjuhs wid our own folks.
Ef a strainjuh die yuh, we bury em in duh strainjuh's lot." [2]

795 Emma Stevens,* tall and slim, a baby in her arms and sev-
eral small children gathered about her, spoke up, "Yuh got

* *Emma Stevens, Sunbury.*

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juh on em too. They's made of haiah, an nails,[10] an grave-
yahd dut,[9] sometimes from pieces of cloth an string. They
tie em all up in a lill bag. Some of em weahs it roun the
wrist, some of em weahs it roun the neck,[11b] an some weahs a
dime on the ankle. Then ef somebody put down cunjuh fuh
em it tun black an[12a, c, d] they git anothuh one tuh wawd off
the evil.[6] Some of em has a frizzled chicken in the yahd.
People do say they kin dig up cunjuh an keep it frum
wukin gense yuh.[12a]

"Yuh heah all the time bout folks wut is cunjuhed. They
gits crippled up an ef they dohn do nuthin bout it, some of
em dies."[15]

We asked if river baptisms were still held in the section
and Liza answered, "Yes'm, they hole the baptisms right
down yonduh in the rivuh. They always hole em on the ebb
tide; that's so the sins be washed away. All the pruhcession
mahch down tuh the rivuh. The preachuh leads the way.
Fus the preachuh stan on the bank an pray. Then he take
the candidates one by one an dip em in the watuh. Then he
make a prayuh fuh the rivuh tuh wash away the sins.[23] I call
that prayuh 'the matrinal.'"

Liza was unable to explain just what this term meant, but
she said it was always applied to the prayer to the river.
She told us, too, that "settin-ups" were held for those who
died and that the mourners sat up all night with the body
and sang and prayed. "In the ole days they always use tuh
beat the drum at the funeral an they still does it tuhday. As
they take the body tuh the graveyahd, they beat the drum as
they move long.[24] They put the body in the grave. Then
they mahch roun an sing an beat the drum."

We had been told that several midwives rendered services
to those residing in the section. We asked Liza about this
and she told us, "Anna Johnson, she's my sistuh. She's a
midwife an she tends tuh lots of folks roun heah. Those
midwifes sho knows wut tuh do.[45] They use a shahp knife

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764 tings, den duh udduhs in duh fambly will die too. Dey will
[761] folluh right long. Folks alluz hab two fewnuls. We hab one wen dey die an den once a yeah we hab a suhvice fuh ebrybody wut died durin duh yeah.[43] Duh preachuh say a prayuh fuhrum all."

795 From this source we obtained added verification of the fact that river baptisms were still held.

[783] "We alluz baptize on duh ebb tide," said Rosa. "Duh
[782] watuh washes duh sin away. Duh preachuh pray up on duh bank an den wen he baptize duh candidate, he pray tuh duh ribbuh tuh take away duh sins."[63]

527 Later in the conversation the women recalled harvest festivals[38] that had been held many years before. "Dat wuz alluz a big time." Anna's rather somber face lit up at the remembrance of the festive occasion. "Ebrybody bring some ub duh fus crop tuh duh chuch an we prepeahs a big
[782] feas. We pray an gib tanks fuh duh crop an pray fuh duh
[535] nex yeah. We all eat an sing an dance. One uh duh dances call duh Buzzud Lope.[17] We still dance dat tuhday."

115 Rosa told us proudly that she was a granddaughter of
[554] Katherine Basden who had been recognized as a leader among the Negroes in the section.

"Me an muh brudduh wuz muh granmudduh's favorites," she said. "She alluz said she lak us bettuhn all duh udduh chillun. Wen I wuz only bout twelve yeahs ole, she tell me wen I grow up I would take huh place an carry on duh wuk she wuz doin."

[533] Moving her powerful shoulders in rhythm and clapping her hands together, the woman sang us a song that her grandmother had crooned to new-born babies as she held them in her arms. The words were, for the most part, indistinguishable. Over and over we caught one repeated phrase, "nikki yimi, nikki yimi."

[763] "Muh granmudduh wuz took very sick. She knew she wuz gonuh die. Dat wuz jis wen muh oldes chile wuz bawn.

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dey put salt on duh stomach tuh keep it frum purgin. Ebrybody put duh hands on um tuh say good-bye.[31]

"On duh way tuh duh grabe dey beat duh drum as dey is mahchin long.[34] Wen duh body is put in duh grabe, ebrybody shout roun duh grabe in a succle, singin an prayin. Each one trow a hanful uh dut in duh grabe." [36]

The conversation shifted to topics of a more cheerful nature and Rachel told us that in former years at harvest time, they had been in the habit of holding "crop suppuhs." [38]

Her face creased itself into a delightful grin and her eyes shone as she told us, "Dat sho wuz a big time. We hab a big feas. All night we shouts an in duh mawnin right at sunrise we pray an bow low tuh duh sun. Muh great-gran—she name Peggy—I membuh she pray ebry day, at sunrise, at noon, an at sunset. She kneel down wen she pray an at duh en she bow low tree times, facin duh sun."

Alec's thoughts in the meantime had turned to more trivial affairs. He went on to tell us about the various dances that are popular at the present-day social affairs.

"Cose we do duh Buzzud Lope," [17] he began. "Ebrybody knows dat. Den we alluz does anudduh dance. We calls it 'Come Down tuh duh Myuh.' We dance roun an shake duh han an fiddle duh foot. One ub us kneel down in duh middle uh duh succle. Den we all call out an rise an shout roun, an we all fling duh foot agen."

In answer to our question about river baptisms the old people informed us that they are still held in the section. Alec described these. "We all sing an pray an duh preachuh pray tuh duh Lord. Cose duh candidate caahn be save less he reely want tuh be. Duh preachuh an duh candidates goes down in duh watuh. Den duh preachuh make a prayuh tuh duh ribbuh an duh ribbuh washes duh sin away." [63]

It is bad luck to eat certain types of food, Rachel told us. This belief had never influenced Rachel or Alec but they

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hollowed-out log set on legs served as a watering trough for the ox.

Susan told us about the death of her mother, Rachel La Conte, who had come from Liberty County. "She die right in dis house. Dey measure uh wid a string. Dey beat duh drum tuh tell ebrybody bout duh settin-up.[26] We all set up wid duh body. We hab a big wash pot full uh coffee an hab a big sack uh soda crackuh fuh duh folks.[27a, b] Ebrybody place dey han bery light on uh eahs an on uh nose an den dey say, 'Dohn call me. I ain ready fuh tuh go yit.'[30, 31]

"We bury uh by tawch light attuh dahk. Ebrybody mahch roun duh grabe in a succle. Ebry night attuh duh fewnul I put food on duh poach fuh duh spirit tuh come git it.[58, 59]

"In duh ole days dey beat duh drum tuh call duh people tuh duh fewnul.[24] Dey beat it slow—boom—boom—boom. Wen dey wannuh stuhrup duh folks fuh a dance aw frolic, dey beats duh drum fas. Den dey knows it ain fuh no fewnul an dat it's fuh a good time. Duh people neahby, wen dey heahs it, beats deah drum an das how dey sends a message so udduh folks gits it.[26]

"I kin membuh two kine uh drum. Deah wuz duh lill kittle drum. Hit wuz bout fifteen inches cross an tree an a half foot high. Dat wuz duh drum dey beat fuh a settin-up."

Susan, too, gave us a description of the river baptisms. "Dey baptize in duh watuh down at duh landin. All duh candidates is dressed in wite. Dey all confess deah sins an say dey want tuh be save.

"We all mahch long in a line an sing an pray. Wen we git tuh duh ribbuh bank, we stop an duh preachuh say a long prayuh tuh duh Lawd. Den duh preachuh take duh candidates one by one and dey go down in duh ribbuh. Duh preachuh he say a prayuh tuh duh ribbuh. Dey alluz bap-

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tize on duh ebb tide cuz duh ribbuh is spose tuh wash duh sins away.[63] All duh folks sing a song called *All Muh Sins Done Wash Away*."

There were several white chickens wandering about the yard and Susan told us that her principal reason for keeping them was that they possessed the power to dig up conjure.[13]

We asked the old woman if she had ever known any Africans, and she said, "I know one man. He name Primus O'Neal. He come frum Africa an he talk funny talk. He call a pot a 'jam.' I membuh he say, 'Lemme cook sumpm fuh nyam.' He mean sumpm fuh tuh eat."

It later developed that this same Primus O'Neal was the grandfather of Rosa Grant * whom we found living in a small gray cottage on the Townsend Road. Rosa was sixty-five years old, with copper-colored skin and rather aquiline features.

We asked about her grandfather and she told us some of the things of which she had heard him speak.

"He tell me dey nebuh hab tuh plant in Africa. Dey gadduh wile okra an palmettuh cabbage fuh food frum duh forres. He tell bout a wine call 'figlin watuh' dat dey drink in Africa. But he nebuh say jis how dey make it.

"Muh gran come frum Africa too. Huh name wuz Ryna. I membuh wen I wuz a chile seein muh gran Ryna pray. Ebry mawnin at sun-up she kneel on duh flo in uh ruhm an bow obuh an tech uh head tuh duh flo tree time. Den she say a prayuh. I dohn membuh jis wut she say, but one wud she say use tuh make us chillun laugh. I membuh it wuz 'ashamnegad.' Wen she finish prayin she say 'Ameen, ameen, ameen.'

"She talk plenty bout cunjuh.[13] Say dat wen a pusson bin made tuh swell up frum a ebil spell, dey got tuh hab somebody tuh pray an drag fuhrum. Ef yuh hab a pain aw

* *Rosa Grant, Townsend Road, Possum Point.*

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Club. We followed the road for about two miles and came finally to a signpost directing us to turn right in order to reach the club. This section in former times had been occupied by extensive plantation holdings. Most of these estates had been deserted for years and now and then we saw a house, once evidently charming but now in a dilapidated and crumbling condition.

Through an old gateway to what had once been a prosperous estate we rode past acres now weed-grown and neglected. At last we came upon a one story white plantation house. Inside blinds were at all of the French windows and the wide floor boards gave indication that the house had probably been standing for about one hundred years.

The man for whom we were looking was plowing in a field at the rear. Baker's rugged build and his keen intellect made it difficult to believe that he was in his late seventies. For years he had acted as caretaker of the club and often lived in the plantation house, as it had been unoccupied for some time.

He had heard of the custom of beating drums to warn people of a recent death. He said, "Dey use tuh alluz beat duh drum aw blow duh hawn wen somebody die.[24] Dey beat two licks on duh drum, den dey stop, den dey beat tree licks. Wen yuh beat dat, yuh know somebody done die.[24, 26] Lots uh duh drums wuz home-made. Dey wuz made out uh goat skin aw coon skin wut stretch out obuh hoops.[25] Deah wuz tree sizes uh drums. Deah wuz duh big barrel drum. It wuz highuhn it wuz cross. Den deah wuz a lill drum frum twelve tuh fifteen inches wide an bout eighteen inches high. Duh udduh drum wuz duh medium size, kine uh in between duh udduh two. Duh big drum wuz duh one dey beat at duh wake. Dey use drums at dances an meetins, too.

"Wen we hab a fewnul, we all mahch roun duh grabe in a ring. We shout an pray."

We wanted to know if river baptisms were always held

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795 during an ebb tide and Lawrence hastened to assure us,
783 "Yes'm, dey alluz hole duh baptism on a high ebb tide. Das so duh tide will carry duh sin out." [63]

551 Had the old man ever known any people who had been named for the days of the week?

"I knowd one man name Fridy, one dat wuz name Satdy an anudduh he name wuz Toosdy. Guess dey name um dataway cuz dey wuz bawn on doze days." [20]

262 Baker told us that many people in the section refused to
777 eat certain foods, believing bad luck would follow if they ate them.

"Deah's lots dataway now," he commented. "Lots uh folks dohn eat some food cuz ef dey did dey say it would bring bad luck on duh parents. Some dohn eat rice, some dohn eat egg, an some dohn eat chicken." [65]

829 "Muh gran, she Rachel Grant, she use tuh tell me bout lot
782 uh deze tings. I membuh she use tuh pray ebry day at sunrise, at middle day and den at sunset. She alluz face duh sun an wen she finish prayin she alluz bow tuh duh sun. She
567 tell me bout duh slabes wut could fly too. Ef dey didn lak
829 it on duh plantation, dey jis take wing an fly right back tuh
789 Africa.

"Muh gran say dey use tuh eat wid oystuh shells. Use
412 um fuh spoons. Wen dey go tuh shoot duh gun, dey ketch
237 duh fyuh wid a rag an flint."
411 We asked him if he had ever heard of a hoe that worked
789 by itself and he told us that he had often heard this story regarding the hoe [39] and that he had also heard many tales about a magic rail splitting wood without anyone touching it.

825 Suddenly the quiet of the afternoon was shattered by a high reed-like whistling sound. It continued for quite a time, then stopped as abruptly as it had started. Was it a person or an animal? It was impossible for us to tell.

"Das a spiduh, missus," Baker explained. "It come roun

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115
(351) the house. Across the road to the left was a field which had been planted in corn.

Charles, a medium-sized, intelligent man, very black of skin and rather small-featured, talked to us about his people.

(165) "Dey is long libin people," he began. "Muh fathuh lib until he a hundud an muh mothuh wuz ninety wen she die. Muh gran, she name Louise an come frum Bahama Ilun.* She lib tuh hundud an fifteen. Das duh way dey do an I guess I'll do duh same."

178 Did the people around Harrington believe in the old customs the way his mother and grandmother had believed in them?

"Yes'm, dey sticks tuh em but duh times is changin an yuh
(764) hab tuh change wid em. Duh unduhtakuh come now an mone lakly he bring yuh back tuh duh chuch an dey ain no watch an singin."

795 In the course of our talk he told us that the river baptisms were held by members of the local churches. "Yes'm, we still baptize in duh ribbuh," Charles said. "We hab one not long ago. We hab tuh wait till a Sunday wen a ebb tide
(783) come at a good time, cuz it duh ebb tide wut carry yuh sin away."[63]

754 Charles confirmed what the other residents had told us regarding conjure.

"Well, dey's some belieb in cunjuh an some wut dohn.
(753) Dey's lots wut say sickness ain natchul an somebody put sumpm down fuh yuh.[15] I ain belieb in it much muhsef but
829 dey's curious tings happen. Now, wen I wuz a boy deah's a root makuh wut lib yuh name Alexanduh. He wuz African an he say he kin do any kine uh cunjuh wut kin be done an he kin cuo any kine uh disease.[49] He wuz a small man,
789 slim an bery black. Alexanduh say he could fly.[68b, 69a] He

(567) *A number of slaves accompanied their masters from the West Indies to this country. It was also the custom for slave ships to stop at the Bahamas en route to America with a cargo.*

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829 Asked if he remembered any other Africans who tied their
567 heads up, the old man told us, "I membuh a ole uhmun name Daphne. He didn tie he head up lak ole man Israel. He weah loose wite veil on he head. He wuz shahp-feechuh too an light uh complexion. He weah one ring in he eah fuh he eyes.[37] I hab refrence to it bein some kine uh pruhtection
[782] tuh he eyes. Wen he pray, he bow two aw tree times in duh middle uh duh prayuh."

535 We asked about the music they used to have and what they used for dancing in the old days.

"We ain dance den duh way dey dances now. We dance
[533] roun in a succle an den we dances fuh prayin.[19a] I membuhs
[534] we use tuh hab drums fuh music an we beat duh drum fuh dances.[23]

764 "Now, ole man Dembo he use tuh beat duh drum tuh duh
533 fewnul,[24] but Mr. Couper he stop dat. He say he dohn wahn drums beatin roun duh dead. But I watch em hab a fewnul. I gits behine duh bush an hide an watch an see wut dey does. Dey go in a long pruhcession tuh duh buryin groun an dey beat duh drums long duh way an dey submit duh body tuh duh groun. Den dey dance roun in a ring an dey motion wid
[535] duh hans.[18] Dey sing duh body tuh duh grabe an den dey let it down an den dey succle roun in duh dance.

567 "Dey ain hab no chuch in doze days an wen dey wannuh
782 pray, dey git behine duh house aw hide someweah an make a great prayuh. Dey ain suppose tuh call on duh Lawd; dey hadduh call on duh massuh an ef dey ain do dat, dey git nine an tutty.

567 "Dey ain marry den duh way dey do now. Attuh slabery
[585] dey hadduh remarry. Dey hab big baptizin in duh ribbuh
[795] lak dey do tuhday an dey dip em on duh ebb tuh wash duh
[783] sins away an duh preachuh he make a great prayuh tuh duh ribbuh.[63]

534 "Ole man Okra he a great un fuh buil drum.[35] He take a calf skin an tan it an make duh side uh maple. Ise pretty

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ple an dey all say dey plant duh crop an dey dohn hadduh wuk it. I heah lot ub em tell how dey git obuh yuh. Dey trap em on a boat wid a red flag."

Old Tom Floyd was not the only root doctor Floyd could remember. There were many others, he said, some still living and plying their trade.[48]

"I knows a root makuh now," he told us. "Uncle Quawt, he root makuh. Does yuh know him?"

We replied that we had known Quarterman for some time but that he had never told us he could work roots.

"Maybe he ain tell yuh but he kin wuk em all right.[49] He kin put a cunjuh on wid a goofa bag as good as anybody. Now, I tell yuh bout im. Deah's two felluhs in Brunswick wut does a lill killin an wen duh case is call, two buzzud light on duh cote house an wen duh men come up befo duh jedge, he let um go free. Now, Uncle Quawt, he had sumpm tuh do wid dat. Dey ain so many root makuhs lef."

Floyd, too, had heard of Alexander, the old African root maker.

"Yes'm, Ise heahd much bout im. He wuz still libin wen I wuz a boy. Ise heahd em tell plenty uh tales bout im. Dey say duh boat leab fuh Savannah an Alexanduh he yuh. He say good-bye frum yuh an tell em tuh go on widout im but he say he see em deah an wen duh boat git tuh Savannah, Alexanduh he in Savannah on duh dock tuh ketch duh line."

Pleasant memories associated with the social activities of the past caused Floyd to ponder abstractedly for a time. Finally he roused himself and told us, "We use tuh dance roun tuh a drum an a rattle goad. Dey could make good drum frum hawg an bass drum frum cow.[25] Doze days dey ain only beat duh drum fuh dancin; dey beat it on duh way tuh duh grabe yahd.[34] Dat wuz fuh duh det mahch wen dey use tuh carry duh body in a wagon. Dey hab lot uh singin den too an dey hab singin at duh baptizin. Den dey baptize em in duh ribbuh jis lak dey does now. Dey sing wid all duh

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candidates walkin in wite robes tuh duh ribbuh an duh preachuh he dip em on duh ebb tide an he pray duh ribbuh tuh take duh sin away.[62] Dey ain mine gittin wet in duh ribbuh.

"Heahd bout duh Ibo's Landing? Das duh place weah dey bring duh Ibos obuh in a slabe ship an wen dey git yuh, dey ain lak it an so dey all staht singin an dey mahch right down in duh ribbuh tuh mahch back tuh Africa, but dey ain able tuh git deah. Dey gits drown."

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
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795 794 "Wade in the Water," the candidates, each escorted by a church member, followed to the water's edge. There the girls' skirts were tied above their knees to prevent undignified billowing, and the assisting deacon led each candidate to the spot where the minister stood in about two-and-a-half feet of water.

The Negroes probably follow the usual procedure of white Baptists; however, I find that no two preachers use precisely the same words, though the substance is [788] always the same: "In obedience to the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ I baptize thee"—and at this point the immersion takes place—"in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen"—and up comes the sputtering, shivering candidate. When the procession returns to the church, the ones who have just been baptized line up and receive the "right hand of fellowship" from the minister and the church members—and not until then may they consider themselves as safely within the fold.

Although the water was bitterly cold that February morning, the young people behaved very well, and only one squealed a little—which was considered very bad form. If you do not come up like a lamb it is "suspicioned" that your conversion has not been authentic, and the baptism may need to be performed again.

795 178 [783] In the old days, when the Negroes were closer to Africa, baptisms in the tide-water section took place punctiliously, no matter how inconvenient the hour, on the outgoing tide.[14] In the interior, of course, where rivers and streams can be depended upon to carry the candidate's sins away from him, a baptism can be safely set for any appointed hour. Now, cement tanks are built in the yards of conventional churches, and another picturesque custom will soon be a thing of the past. Many a time have I gone to the South End or to Frederica, before sunrise, in the hope of learning something new. Something new was not always forthcoming, but the picture in the low morning light was worth going miles to see.

[14] *The stress laid by Negro Baptists upon baptism being performed on the outgoing tide lends support to the theory, held by Melville Herskovits, that the strong adherence to the ritual of baptism among Negro Christians is related to "the great importance of the river-cult in Africa, particularly in view of the fact that, as has often been observed, river-cult priests were sold into slavery in great numbers."* (Handbook of Social Psychology.)

[114] [171]